

County fair serves as starting point for national country music contest

By Sam Dieter

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Local musicians will have the chance to enter a nationwide country music competition at the Thomas County Free Fair next week.

The Texaco Country Showdown will be at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. Sacha Sanguinetti, manager for KXXX radio station here, said the deadline to sign up to compete is today. But the concert itself is free.

Last year was the first year the showdown was held in Colby. The show is part of a national competition for aspiring country music artists, the largest in the country.

“They start at the local level, which is what the show is here,” he said. “There’s local competitions all over.”

The winner of the showdown goes on to the statewide competition Thursday, Aug. 8, at the Northwest Kansas Free Fair in Goodland. Eight singers and bands signed up last year, performing both their own songs and covers of others. Tuckers’ Town – Spence Byer and Luke Reed from Cimarron – won the showdown. Sanguinetti said they finished well at the state competition.

He pointed out that a performer can sign up for any local competition anywhere, provided they have not won anywhere else. In fact, last year’s showdown included a few kids from Goodland and Gem. North Range Band, one of the competitors last year, included Colby members Jordan Sharp, Rusty Helin, Brock Wagoner and Brandon and Blake McLemore.

There are seven shows in Kansas, and 450 nationwide. There are five regional competitions before the national competition in Nashville, Tenn.

The winner of that competition will get a \$100,000 recording contract. Scott City native Heather Shelly won the national competition in 2004.

The showdown will be emceed by representatives of Rockin M radio, including their KXXX, 97.9 FM KWGB, 100.3 FM KR DQ, 73 AM KLOE and 102.5 KKCI FM stations, located in Colby and Goodland. KWGB is the

official sponsor.

Sanguinetti pointed out that some big artists in the country music genre made their name through this competition, including Bard Paisley, Sara Evans, Leann Rimes, Garth Brooks and Martina McBride. But he doesn’t think many of them actually won the national competition.

“You could say it’s a lot like *American Idol* or *The Voice*,” he said. “Even if you don’t win it, there’s talent scouts, you know, and record labels that will see your work.”



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Local performers got to enter a national country music competition in Colby for the first time last year, including Kit Boyington (left) and Davie Fisher (above).

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